

4, the bill that is being brought up for debate. I don't support S. 4 as it was written and as it was introduced. What I can support in its place and as a starting point is the substitute amendment that the majority has agreed to lay down should the Senate agree to begin debate. That substitute amendment contains more than a dozen significant changes that my team and I have been working with others to negotiate.

So the question, I think, needs to be asked: Is that enough? And I say: No, it is not enough. Even with those changes, I still have concerns, and I know that many of my colleagues on this side of the aisle have concerns. Substantive changes will be needed before this measure is ready to pass the Senate.

So, if this procedural vote fails today, where do I think we go next? We have to go back. We have to consider this legislation through regular order, through the committee process.

In the meantime, I mentioned just the politicization, the partisanship that we have seen with these issues. I think: Let's stop the show votes. Let's give ourselves the space to work cooperatively across the aisle to reach the level of consensus that I think is important. It is important for this issue, and it is important for this country.

The goal here should be to avoid a partisan bill, not to take failing votes over and over for political gain. It really doesn't get us anywhere. It gets us on record. It allows you to weaponize, if you will, a critically important issue. It doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't serve anyone. It, ultimately, accomplishes nothing. Our only real option here is to figure out how we are working together on this. Our goal should be to match what we did in 2006 when the last reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act passed the Senate 98 to 0.

Wouldn't that be a goal for us all? Wouldn't that send a signal to people across this country—from Alaska to Maine—to have faith in our electoral process, in our elections?

Now, some may be wondering why, as a Republican, I am willing to put my name next to this legislation, pretty publicly, and acknowledge that it is not where I want the bill to be right now. But at this point, I think, if we can step back from the political exercise, I think we can do good. I think we need to do good. I believe that those of us who want to find common ground need to be part of the process. We need to be willing to get in, mix it up, and work it out, instead of sitting back on the sidelines and saying: I just don't like your product, and I am not going to offer anything else. I just don't like your product.

So let's get in the arena. Given my role as vice chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, I believe that I have an obligation to help resolve some of the longstanding issues that face our Native peoples in Alaska and around the country.

Finally, I believe it is simply dangerous to let voting rights become a wholly partisan issue, where our divisions just fester and take root in an area that is so central to our system of government.

So the vote in front of us today is procedural in nature on whether to open debate. It is not on final passage or anything close to it. There are even things in the substitute text that I, frankly, don't support and others that I have not been able to fully evaluate. But I also recognize that the framework within the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act is the most viable that we have, and it is the best starting point at which to legislate. So I will vote to begin this debate in the hopes that this is a step forward, not a step backward, as we are seeking a bipartisan accord.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that Senators HOEVEN, MURRAY, MCCONNELL, and I be able to complete our remarks prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, Senator HOEVEN and I are here to speak in favor of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, but I did want to first thank Senator MURKOWSKI for her well-reasoned remarks and for her willingness to go forward with this debate. This is a debate about fundamental voting rights. We may not agree on everything, but she wants to have the debate, and that is all we are asking for.

We are asking to move forward with this very important piece of legislation. If there are things people don't like or things they like, we can discuss them, but this place has got to start working. We need to restore the Senate so we can debate the big issues of our time.

I truly appreciate Senator MURKOWSKI's willingness to do this today with her vote.

#### NOMINATION OF MICHAEL LEE CONNOR

Madam President, I come to the floor briefly today to support Michael Connor's nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works.

Senator HOEVEN and I are here together because we both care very much about getting this position filled. All of us have major, major projects in our States that need to be built, and he needs to get in this job. We are hopeful that we will have a vote on this tomorrow.

Michael brings to this position unparalleled experience in water management, and I am not just talking about his professional work but also his upbringing. He grew up on the edge of the desert in New Mexico, and he was raised with a heightened understanding of the importance of water practices. Over the course of his career, he has spent nearly two decades at the De-

partment of the Interior. During that time, he led efforts on water resource management. This experience will be vital as he takes on this new leadership role.

We all know about the importance of the Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works Program, from supporting navigation on our inland waterways and coastal ports to maintaining reservoirs that supply water to communities, to providing flood protection and risk management.

Senator HOEVEN and I are here together because we care a lot about flood protection. The Red River doesn't divide us between Minnesota and North Dakota; it unites us in our efforts to protect our communities. The Red River of the North has exceeded flood stage 55 times between 1902 and 2019, and the problem has worsened in recent years, with 7 of the top 10 floods occurring during the last 30 years. As we begin to see more and more severe impacts from extreme weather events, water management and resiliency will be increasingly important all over the country.

To build up sustainable water infrastructure that can manage flooding across all 50 States, we need leaders like Michael Connor overseeing the Army Corps. Time and again, he has proven himself to be a dedicated and capable leader.

Michael Walsh, a retired Army major general and former Corps of Engineers Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, said in an interview that Michael Connor "has deep experience with water resource issues. He'll bring that experience to the Army."

I am proud to be supporting him. Again, we are very hopeful that we can have this vote tomorrow.

I want to thank Senator HOEVEN for the work that he has done in making sure we can clear the way for this vote on his side of the aisle.

Senator HOEVEN.

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I thank the senior Senator from Minnesota for her hard work in getting Michael Connor to the floor. I have been very pleased to join with her, and, obviously, we are hopeful that, tomorrow, we will have that vote.

The position of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works is critical to every Member of this body. Every State has interactions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Assistant Secretary is the top civilian who oversees the Corps of Engineers. The Assistant Secretary plays a vital role in formulating the Corps' budget, in setting policy and priorities for the Corps, and in ensuring that an incredible array of projects is managed and executed across the Nation.

For example, in my State of North Dakota, we have Corps projects in communities like Minot on flood protection. A number of years ago, we had 11,000 people and 4,000 homes and buildings inundated. Obviously, flood protection is incredibly vital for them,

and we need the Corps working to get that done.

In the Red River Valley of the North, as Senator KLOBUCHAR said so accurately, we are working together for comprehensive flood protection in that region. It is a multibillion-dollar, multi-State project that uses the latest approach of a public-private partnership with a WIFIA loan guarantee. We are doing things in a way that hasn't been done before that can really help us cut into the backlog that the Corps has on these flood projects.

But it takes a lot of work and a lot of creativity to keep that moving forward, and so we need the Assistant Secretary in place to help us do that, and that is why we need to move forward with this confirmation vote.

And as Senator KLOBUCHAR said correctly, Mr. Connor is well qualified for this position. He held the No. 2 position at Interior from 2014 to 2017. He also served as Commissioner of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation from 2009 to 2014. He worked on Capitol Hill from 2001 to 2009 as counsel to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

So he has got the background to do this. He is ready to go. Let's have this vote on confirmation and let's put him to work for the great people of this great country.

And with that, I would defer again to the Senator from Minnesota for any concluding remarks she has, but, again, I want to thank her for working on this in a bipartisan way.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. With that, I will turn it over to Senator MURRAY.

Thank you very much, Senator HOEVEN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

#### NOMINATION OF RAJESH D. NAYAK

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, first of all, I come to the floor to call for the confirmation of Rajesh Nayak to serve as Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy.

Over the past year and a half, our working families across the country have really struggled through the most unequal economic crisis in recent history.

COVID put a glaring spotlight on many of the problems workers were already facing before this pandemic and has worsened longstanding inequities, making life harder for women, workers of color and workers with disabilities, and others.

If we are going to build back stronger and fairer from this pandemic, then our Federal Agencies must be fully staffed with highly qualified people who will help us tackle the many challenges hurting workers, retirees, and their families.

Mr. Nayak already has an impressive track record of doing just that. Mr. Nayak served as a senior adviser to Secretary Walsh at the Department, and also previously served in the Solicitor's office as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Deputy Chief of

Staff. In those roles, he has worked on a broad portfolio of issues important to workers across the country, including workforce development, worker protection, counter-trafficking, overtime pay, health and safety, retirement security, and more.

He has also worked twice at the National Employment Law Project, including most recently as deputy CEO. As an advocate and a policymaker, he has shown time and again his commitment to empowering workers, supporting families, and advancing equity. And I have no doubt that, if confirmed as Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy, he will continue working in the best interests of workers and their families, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting in support of his nomination.

#### JOHN LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Madam President, I also rise today before this really crucial vote because I want to make it clear that Democrats are not done on the issue of voting rights.

First of all, I want to thank my colleague, Senator MURKOWSKI, from Alaska, whose remarks we should all listen to because we do have some who are repeatedly preventing us from even debating voting rights legislation; most recently the Freedom to Vote Act.

I want everybody to know we are not done fighting to ensure that every person in this country has equal and fair access to the ballot. We are not done because the cause we are fighting for here today is a just one and Americans want to see us protect their right to vote, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act does exactly that.

This bill will restore and strengthen the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which is one of the most important bills in our Nation's history. It was a bipartisan rejection of racist attempts by States to deny the ballot to people of color, and it came after years of dedicated work by activists and lawmakers, including the late, honorable Congressman Lewis, who were and are intent on ensuring our country followed through on our Nation's most fundamental promise to its citizens: the promise that every United States citizen has an equal voice in our elections.

For most of the decades following its passage, the provisions in the 1965 Voting Rights Act have enjoyed bipartisan support. But in recent years, the power and protections of this crucial law have been gutted, and far-right legislators in States across our country are now passing laws that make it harder for communities of color to vote, all based on baseless claims about voter fraud and rigged elections.

It is shameful and it really is anti-democratic, and it should be bigger than partisan politics. We should be able to come together on a bipartisan basis to pass a Federal prohibition on laws that restrict the right to vote based on race. Protecting each citizen's right to have a voice in our democracy

should be as noncontroversial as naming post offices, because the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, and attempts to weaken it weaken the foundation that we all depend on.

Those are the stakes here: the foundation and future of our democracy.

Without equal access to the ballot, how will people tell us what they want to see on most challenging questions of our time, like climate or healthcare or education or so much more?

So even if many of my Republican colleagues disagree with me about the provisions included in this bill, they should at least allow us to move forward on a debate. If they have good-faith ideas how to protect every American's voice in our democracy, we are all ears. But we will need more than one or two Republicans in order to be able to have that debate on the floor and offer amendments.

And if we can't get there, I think we need to be clear. As Congressman Lewis said: "Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society."

To the people of my home State of Washington and to the country: My Democratic colleagues and I are committed and determined to pass strong voting rights legislation.

And we can't keep bringing these bills to the floor only for Republicans to block even a debate. We need to use every legislative tool needed to get the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to President Biden's desk. Whatever we have got to do to pass voting rights, if it means an exemption to the filibuster, then I believe we should do it. This cannot wait.

Passing strong Federal voting rights protections into law will be the most important work this Congress does. We cannot let a Senate procedure stop us from protecting the right to vote in the United States of America.

Let's make sure our democracy stays a democracy, and let's pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, whatever it takes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. This has become an almost weekly routine—my friends on the other side trying to give Washington unprecedented power over how Americans cast their vote.

We don't have time to do the NDAA or an appropriations process, but we always have time for a few more of these stunts. In many of these bills, congressional Democrats propose to make themselves into a national board of elections.

Today, there is a small difference. They want, instead, to hand that power to Attorney General Merrick Garland; different branch of government, same bad idea.

I just want to add one observation from last night. Governors' races and State legislative seats weren't the only